DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 472 984 PS 030 992

AUTHOR	Grubb, Catherine A.
TITLE	Didn't Someone Invite Patty? How Patty Smith Hill's Vision of International Education Has Crossed the Border in a Most Unusual Place!
PUB DATE	2002-04-04
NOTE	19p.; Paper presented at the Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI) Annual International Conference (San Diego, CA, April 4, 2002).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Early Childhood Education; *Educational History; *Educational Philosophy; Foreign Countries; *International Education; *Multicultural Education; Young Children
IDENTIFIERS	Russia

ABSTRACT

This paper distills the history of early childhood education in Russia as a backdrop to a discussion of Patty Smith Hill's visit to the nursery schools and kindergartens of the Soviet Union in the 1930s. The paper begins with a discussion of the introduction of early childhood education in the late 1800s, the lack of educational advances during the hardships of the period surrounding the revolution, and Russian educator Vera Fediaevsky's work and the development of an educational plan emphasizing communistic ideals. The context of Fediaevsky's visit to the United States to observe and visit kindergartens and the resulting invitation to American educators to visit the nursery schools and kindergartens of Soviet Russia are described. The paper then focuses on how Patty Smith Hill's subsequent experience in the Soviet Union contributed to her vision for the early childhood classroom as illustrated in a 1933 radio address "The Kindergarten Child in the New Deal." Finally, the paper considers the impact of inviting multicultural education in an early childhood program in the state of Alabama. Multicultural experiences include a study of Russian culture and language from a Russian national in the classroom for 3 weeks and an annual international festival focusing on a particular country.(Contains 22 references.) (KB)

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ED 472 984

DIDN'T SOMEONE INVITE PATTY? HOW PATTY SMITH HILL'S VISION OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION HAS CROSSED THE BORDER IN A MOST UNUSUAL PLACE!

Presentation given at

Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI) Annual International Conference

San Diego, California

April 4, 2002

Presentation given by,

Catherine A. Grubb
Doctoral Candidate
University of Alabama at Birmingham

PS 030092

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

"Didn't Someone Invite Patty?" How Patty Smith Hill's Vision of International Education Has Crossed the Border in a Most Unusual Place!

Abstract

Patty Smith Hill was intrigued by a speech given to the International Kindergarten Union in 1927 by Vera Fediaevsky. Ms. Fediaevsky was "sent on a mission to this country to study our preschool education, parental work and training of teachers", said Patty Smith Hill in a 1936 introduction to Vera Fediaevsky's book Nursery School and Parent Education in Soviet Russia. This visit from the Russian educator generated a reciprocal invitation for Patty Smith Hill's visit to the nursery schools and kindergartens in Soviet Russia.

Patty was most impressed by what she had seen. In particular how the children and the mothers were educated and cared for in this country. She shared her vision in the same introduction by saying, "all countries need to learn from each other and to pool their experiences for the good of all." Biases and prejudices should be put aside and a sharing among educators needs to prevail. She and other educators have had to battle the closed-mindedness of people in order to do what is thought best in educating young children. There should be no boundaries here.

The best place to begin erasing these prejudices is with young children in the classroom. Young children haven't had the engraining of hardened beliefs of some hurting people and are more welcoming to the differences of others. But what about the young children in states historically identified as closed-minded? What about a place like Alabama? Have they made any steps to invite the vision of Patty Smith Hill into the EC class?

This presentation shared some of the early childhood history in Russia as the backdrop of Patty Smith Hill's invitation and trip and how this experience in the Soviet Union enlarged her world-wide vision for the early childhood classroom. Has Russian early childhood education changed since 1936? We will examine what an unlikely Southern state is doing to see that Patty's vision lives on.

DIDN'T SOMEONE INVITE PATTY? HOW PATTY SMITH HILL'S VISION OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION HAS CROSSED THE BORDER IN A MOST UNUSUAL PLACE!

Introduction

How we have chuckled when hearing a story about a surprise party similar to this one. All the guests have been secretly invited to the party for a loved one. The guests know that this is to be a surprise! Preparing and planning for an event is time consuming and requires diligence for the person or people involved. The planner picks a day, makes calls to businesses, cleans, decorations and party favors are in place, and caterers for the big event have prepared the food. Everything must be perfect! The day arrives and it occurs to the host that everything has been done, but the guest of honor was never invited! How embarrassing! Or, how tragic to invite the guest of honor and no one else comes!

This presentation is an invitation to a special event and you are invited. Be sure, we will not forget the guest of honor, Patty Smith Hill. We want to strive to understand her invitation to Russia, what she experienced, what she did with what she learned, and, finally, the impact of inviting multicultural education into early childhood classes. To begin with, we will survey a short background history of Russian history as it applies to the education of young children. What was the background for Patty Smith Hill's trip to Russia? What was the educational thought in Russia at the time for early childhood education. Then we will discuss the trip itself and its implications of this trip for international education. To complete this we will add something very unique. I'll give you a hint: we will see how a bridge is constructed that will cross the border of prejudice. So let's get started. . .

Russian History

To lay the foundation of our understanding, we need to examine the Russian education history. To begin with, we need to know that the October Rebellion was the dividing point from tsarist rule to the Russian rule as it is today. Prior to the October Rebellion of 1917, Russian education was primarily the responsibility of the Russian Orthodox Church but the focus was still on the elite of the Russian population. The church did little to promote literacy in the masses. Peter the Great's focus was on the study of science and mathematics. Amazingly "the first Russian university was founded in Moscow in 1755, staffed largely by *German professors* [italics added]" (Reynolds, 1981, p. 293).

From 1850 to the October Rebellion, there was a glimmer of educational freedom of expression. "The reform line of 'Free Education' was inspired by the educational teachings of Leo Tolstoi (1828-1910), who is generally considered the founder of Russian progressive education" (Mchitarjan, 2000, p. 111). Pedagogical ideals from other European countries were embraced and teachers' colleges were organized as well as courses for the improvement of teaching styles. Libraries were also built. John Dewey's "educational ideas in Russia began in 1907" (p. 111). Russian educators also studied the Dalton plan and the Project Method. Educators were impressed with the developmental interaction approach characterized by Lucy Sprague Mitchell and Harriet Johnson. Before the rebellion there was an increase in higher education. The focus was still the elite of the Russian population. Literacy in 1897 was 24%, but it grew to 45% in 1914 (Reynolds, J. C., 1981, Mchitarjan, I., 2000).

Baroness Bertha Von Marenholtz, friend and follower of Friedrich Froebel's teachings, in real evangelism fire, went to different countries "kindling enthusiasm for the new system of education. In 1851. . .she sought to interest the grand duchess of Russia by introducing Froebel's

methods into the orphan asylums of St. Petersburg" (Brosterman, 1997, p. 94). As quoted from Life of Baroness von Marenholtz Buelow (1901) written by her niece, Baroness von Buelow,

> The introduction of the Froebel Method into Russia had meantime also begun. In the year 1865 the first foundation was laid by the kind hearted Grand Duchess Helene, who at my aunt's request had sent three young Russian girls to Berlin to be trained. The Grand Duchess Helene, a princess memorable for her intellectual gifts and who did such an immense amount for the cause of education in Russia, graciously bestowed her friendship on my aunt. This was expressed in several clever letters, and the Grand Duchess never stayed in Berlin without immediately sending to my aunt, Baroness von Rahden, her lady in waiting for many years, as charming and clever as she was noble minded. Even when the Grand Duchess was passing occasionally through Berlin, my aunt had to go to the station, in order that the Grand Duchess might at least see her and speak with her for a few minutes.

In spite of Russia's shyness to accept any foreign form of education, von Marenholtz's visit encouraged the creating of "130 private infant schools in St. Petersburg, 26 of which were authentic kindergartens" (Brosterman, 1997, p. 94). By 1887, St. Petersburg also had a small Froebel Society and teachers' training college. Other cities also had this opportunity for their teachers (Brosterman, 1997, p. 155).

During the exile of Lenin and his wife, Nedezhda Krupskaya, they had the opportunity to visit other countries and experience what was offered in pre-school education. They were introduced to the teaching of Froebel and Montessori. "One of Lenin's first goals after the Revolution was to eliminate illiteracy" (Weaver, 1971, p. 56).

Tragedy of 1914-1921

There were few if any flickers of educational advancement during this time. The Russian people may have won their civil war but they almost lost the country. Unspeakable torments were poured on this people and 16 million people died. Wendy Goldman's book (1993), Women, the State and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life 1917-1936 gives a very graphic picture of the state of women and children, "Homeless children roamed the streets of Russian cities well before 1917, but the human loses and social disruptions of World War I, the civil war, and the famine of 1921 swelled their numbers" (p.60). According to statistics quoted in Goldman's book, 2 ½ million men died in World War I, 1 million in the civil war, and those not in war "perished from hunger, cold and disease" (p. 60). From 1918-1919, 1½ million people died from typhus alone. During the winter of 1916, wages were cut because women took the place of men who were battling in the war and the price of food rose by half.

The people suffered more such hardships during the famine of 1920-1921. Because there was nothing to eat, the family had to resort to abandoning or orphaning the children. "By 1921, Moscow had lost half of its population" (Goldman, 1993, p. 61). The coal and oil couldn't reach the cities, so cold weather was also a killing factor. With all of the destruction and human suffering, what was to be done with these orphaned and abandoned children? There were so many abandoned children that the government put them into trains by the thousands and transported them to other parts of Russia. According to Goldman's research (1993), the numbers of children in homes more than double each year from 1917-1920.

In 1922, some schools were closed and used as orphanages or soup kitchens. There were 10,588 soup kitchens that served 1 ½ million people (Goldman, 1993). According to Orlando Figes' book, A People's Tragedy (1996), "[Leo] Tolstoy also gave up his writing to join in the

relief campaign" (p. 160). The stress place on Tolstoy by his fervent work to develop places of relief for the suffering people affected him physically. Because Tolstoy blamed the hardship on the church and the government, a footnote in Figes' book says, "The Orthodox Church which had recently excommunicated Tolstoy, forbade the starving peasant to accept food from his relief campaign"(p. 160).

There was a decrease in daycares, thus preventing women from working or getting an education. This encouraged gruesome abortions done by unqualified people or the abandonment of children because they could not be fed or cared for. These abandoned children were left to wander the streets to join gangs, mug, steal, or to sell their bodies for prostitution. Because of the fearlessness of these individuals, they were often put in the army.

From 1918-1923 there was a focus on "universal elementary school" but the school was an integration of "general and vocational education"(Reynolds, 1981, p. 294). "The first large meeting of pedagogues and social activists took place in 1919"(Goldman, 1993, p. 61). The focus of this meeting was the children who roamed the streets and those young children who were abandoned or ill. In Vera Fediaevsky's book (done in collaboration with Patty Smith Hill), the new government order after the October Rebellion was threefold. One, the government had to "protect the pregnant and nursing mother and her child. . next . . .the child's health. . .third health movement was the organization of permanent and temporary (summer) creches" (Fediaevsky, 1936, p. 6).

Educational Thought of the Time According to Vera Fediaevsky's 1926-1936 Work

So now that we know what the "why" is, let's explore Vera Fediaevsky's work and see what Patty Smith Hill saw in her trip to Russia. As was noted in the Russian history, there were thousands of children needing assistance as well as health care. This was an immense burden to

the government. The government started offering the families of these orphaned children money and land to raise the children properly. Thus the local government, the organization where the parents worked, and a small amount from the parents themselves financed the kindergartens.

Not having an educational system of its own and being leery of other European educational philosophies, the Soviet Union established its own form. Child development study with the appropriate materials was used. Fediaevsky (Sept. 1926) said, "Froebel was a fervent propagandist of the freedom and creative activity of children but his followers managed to transform the kindergarten into a place of lifeless routine" (p. 34). The Russian educators of the time had a hard time accepting "free education". Some of the teachers took the theory to extremes allowing children in one example to put scissors in their mouths or not giving the children paper and pencils because that was covered in a later developmental stage.

Thus the Russian government organized another educational plan emphasizing communistic ideals. Here were the four changes: one, "the recognition of the children's right to group themselves according to their interests. . .[2] instead of Froebel's occupations, children are set to build . . .exercising the larger muscles. . .[3] interest taken in the child's environment. . .[4] self-government in a kindergarten"(Fedicavsky, Sept., 1926, pps. 34-35). The preschool class had become a place to spread communism and Mother and child were most important because this preserved the growth of communism.

"The teacher's part is that of organizer of the child's life" (Fediaevsky, Sept. 1926, p. 34). Themes, curriculum, and fairy tales were not used. Self-help and work for the good of the group was stressed. The children were introduced to the world of work by taking a "field trip" to the industry or factory that sponsors the kindergarten. From this experience, the children would often return to the classroom and role-play what was witnessed at the factory or on the trip – project

method. Observations of nature, transportation, and specific jobs are noted and the children's attention is drawn to it.

Health issues of the children and the pregnant mother were very important to the government. The Soviet government passed laws regulating the care of pregnant women. The mother was allowed to take six weeks off before and after delivery to care for her child without fear of losing her job. There was also time allowed to care for a sick child or family member. Consultation centers were created to educate women on the care of children as well as the care of the mother herself. This was a center for preventative medical attention. It was also a place where "excursions" of grandmothers and children came for information.

Continuing on the subject of health and hygiene, the children were given their own towels and drinking glasses to promote self-care. Each child transferred much of the self-care knowledge taught in the schools. When the child was at home, the child wanted "his own" towel and glass. A doctor also inspected the children several times a year and there was a health care professional on staff at the kindergartens. Because half of the population was illiterate, the health information was transferred on posters in the restrooms and train stations. Using pictures, for example, one half of the poster would show the way to change the baby and on the other half what shouldn't be done.

Each kindergarten was attached to a group of "pioneers". The pioneers were much like the Boy and Girl Scouts of America. They visited the kindergartens and posed as models for the children. Talking to the young children, repairing the toys, playing games, and such activities were done once a week.

Patty Smith Hill's Reason for Going

As a background for Patty Smith Hill's visit to Russia, let's take a glimpse of the person and the excitement she must have had about going on this trip. Patty Hill's family was a strong influence throughout her life. She was permitted "freedom to play for long hours with her siblings in a free-spirited, loving, intellectual environment" (Rudnitski, 1995, p. 20). Early in life Patty knew she wanted to work with children. She was trained by Anna Bryan in the Froebelian education. Patty's strong background of play influenced her to ignore the regimentation of the Froebelian gifts and occupations that was espoused by many of the early kindergarten teachers. Patty instead accepted the spirit and philosophy of Froebel and encouraged the youngsters to explore and make objects with the Froebelian gifts. There is a photo of a city (1915) constructed with the Froebel blocks in the ACEI Archives, University of Maryland (Wolfe, 2000, p. 271).

Patty was influenced to understand and have compassion for the downtrodden and misused people. Her mother as a young girl, took her life in her hands when she secretly taught the slaves to read. As a result, "in 1899, the Louisville Free Kindergarten Association, headed by Patty Smith Hill, opened a normal class for black kindergarteners, and by 1905 had trained 17 black kindergarten teachers" (Beatty, 1989, p. 81). Patty realized the importance of the involvement of parents and the community in early childhood education. She revolutionized the thought of having healthcare professionals as a part of the kindergarten movement. "She pioneered the use of water fountains and paper napkins and the nightly washing of the classroom floors so that diseases would not spread among the children" (Rudnitski, 1995, p. 20).

Patty Smith Hill was not only an advocate for the children, but for the teachers as well. She kept her fingers in many organizations that would improve the teacher and the young children. The International Kindergarten Union (IKU) was established in 1892 as a spring off of

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the National Education Association. IKU eventually became the ACEI (Association for Childhood Education International) in 1931. Patty was a leader in both the IKU and the newly-formed ACEI. Thus, Patty's life, beliefs, and group associations, made this prospect of visiting the kindergartens in a foreign country so exciting.

Vera Fediaevsky's 1926 article in Childhood Education called "The Kindergarten in Russia" prompted an invitation by the International Kindergarten Union to come and speak at the 1927 conference. Vera spent seven weeks visiting kindergartens here in the United States. This visit prompted an invitation in 1929 by the People's Commissar of Education in Russia, Anitoli Vasilievich Lunacharsky, to observe and visit "creches, nursery schools and kindergartens of Soviet Russia"(Hill, 1936, p. ix). Patty Smith Hill and a group of educators accepted the kind invitation to visit Russia.

According to Agnes Snyder, Patty Smith Hill had a "conviction that young children were capable of exercising large powers of self-government, creative activity and initiative, and that these could be channeled into activities leading to a good life in a democratic society" (p. 257). This was one of her beliefs as she accepted the 1905 teaching role at Teachers College at Columbia University. Perhaps what Vera Fediaevsky wrote in her articles to Childhood Education impressed Patty with what could be done with classroom self-government if given the opportunity.

Patty Smith Hill was impressed with the Russian government providing new types of preschool work to meet the different needs of the many varied races and populations in the Russian country. The Russian government also provided for the mothers and children on long journeys. There was a special room at the railroad station, as well as on the train itself, for the

mothers and children to rest and play. This was also the case for mothers who worked in the fields. There was a special place for the mothers to go and feed and play with the babies.

The Implications of the Trip

Can you imagine the wonder that Patty Smith Hill had from this experience? Can you imagine the questions she posed to herself about what could be done to improve the conditions here in America? She was very impressed with Vera Fediaevsky and developed a friendly acquaintance with Madam Fediaevsky. Patty encouraged her to write a book about pre-school and parent education in the Soviet Union. Patty Smith Hill said in the introduction to Vera Fediaevsky's book (1936), "Surely a country that has produced a Pavlov should have something to teach us and should as well be able to learn from other countries. It behooves us to learn willingly all that each country has to teach us"(p. xiv).

Patty Smith Hill tried to find a person who understood English as well as Russian to help with any translation problems – although Vera Fediaevsky was very fluent in English. So Vera wrote the book in English. The book was ready for publication and no one could be found with the special qualifications needed to clarify any of Vera's English. So Patty took the job herself. Dorothy Hewes recounted an interview with Lois Meek Stolz about Patty Smith Hill. It is a picture of the kind of person that Patty Smith Hill was, "Dr. Stolz describes Professor Hill as always remaining a Southern lady but one convinced that she knew what should be done better than anyone else" (Hewes, 1976, p. 304). Hill said this about taking over the job of getting the book published, "I considered the material in the book too valuable to American and English pre-school workers to fail to stand by and carry the enterprise through to success" (1936, p. xv).

Russian Education in the Twentieth Century

Irina Mchitarjan, in her article in the journal Studies in Philosophy and Education (2000), said, "Henceforth, progressive educational ideas – including those from other countries – had to conform to the educational standards of the Soviet state. Yet, despite state control, the 20's in Russia (until the introduction of the first five-year plan in 1928) can be seen as a period of extensive educational experimentation" (p. 110). After September 5, 1931, "any reference to the Russian heritage of educational reform, or to foreign models of progressive education, became impossible"(p. 110).

From 1929-1932, there "was a transitional period in education moving away from child-centered experiments of the twenties into the realism, disciplinarian, and examination-centered concept that characterized Soviet education from 1932-1958" (Reynolds, 1981, p. 294). Heredity or home meant nothing. The primary point was the social environment. Also, we need to remember that, "the parents are always on trial, always subject to rebuke or rejection by society and by their own children if they do not conform to and live up to he standards set by the party and the school" (Mead & Calas, 1955, p. 184). Also in Margaret Mead and Elena Calas' chapter, they quoted K. N. Kornilov (1948) as saying, "School is for study, and study cannot be unconstrained. . .Kindergarten must renounce lack of restraint in activities" (p.195).

As an example of the strictness of the education reform can be seen in these requirements for entrance to first grade from William Gombar's article in Education (Apr.-May, 1969):

1. Ability to count up to 30
2. Ability to add and subtract numbers of one digit
3. Ability to express his ideas with adequate vocabulary
4. Ability to form sentences with correctness, coherence

5. Ability to retell short stories
6. Ability to recite several poems (p. 372)

The children were made to be attentive and these qualifications were stressed. Another thing I thought was interesting, Gombar also said, "Teachers advance with their pupils in the first four grades" (p. 372). Corporeal punishment is not allowed. In several books I found that either withholding love, standing a long time, or correction by the other students in the classroom was how the children were disciplined (Mead,1955; Weaver, 1971).

International Education

Although Patty Smith Hill's 1933 radio address "The Kindergarten Child in the New Deal" was focused on the need of American kindergarten classes in public schools, I believe that her quote would be appropriate for the encouragement of international education, "Deprivations imposed upon any one stage [of life] tell not only at the time, but affect later stages, where lost opportunities are difficult if not impossible to make up." In the light of this quote, when one thinks of the state of Alabama, what do you think of? Surely the words: "prejudice", "slavery", and "close mindedness" come to mind. Let's consider these thoughts: Russian, Chinese, and Japanese cultures being experienced in early childhood education and Spanish language classes being taught on a weekly basis in Shelby County in Alabama. Are you surprised? Yes, we are inviting the ideals of Patty Smith Hill into our classrooms. It has not been easy to sway some parents, but as a group of teachers a lot can be done

Although I have never been to Russia to experience the educational system, it has come to my classroom. I had the opportunity to pilot the Russian language and culture part for my school at the time. It was something that I volunteered for and it was a labor of love. A Russian national came into the classroom two-three times a week for about three weeks. These children

hungered and thirsted for this experience. They learned words, some letters, geography, dance and music. The children learned a little about the Russian classroom and culture. Russian children bring the teacher flowers the first day of school. The girls wear bows, comparable to bows on a package, in their hair. The children learned to stand when the teacher entered the room as well as fold their arms on the desk. One of the experiences was the Easter celebration and we ate pound cake (the recipe for the traditional "kulich" was complicated so we substituted). The learning experience ended with a birthday party. We made and decorated our own babushkas (scarves) for the girls and sashes for the boys. Everyone drank warm tea poured from a real Russian samovar into china cups and saucers. We put sugar cubes into our tea, poured it into the saucer to cool it, and sipped it from the saucer – just like Russian children.

Here is another annual event that Alabama has to raising international awareness. The Birmingham International Festival sponsors a particular country. This year (2002) the focus was on The Republic of South Africa. They offer a Saturday's experience at one of the large schools for teachers. The cost is minimal and the teachers return with arms full of supplies and activities appropriate for use in their grade level classroom. The celebration is extended to a street festival where children and families can come and enjoy the heritage.

Also, Alabama has been privileged to have companies from different countries to settle in our state. With them, they have brought their culture and heritage. Festivals in honor of these cultures are celebrated in many cities and towns in Alabama. Alabama has not reached perfection, by any stretch of the word, but we are trying to give the best of what we can to our young children so that they may carry the experience into different stages of life so that life will be richer and perhaps less biased. As Dorothy Hewes (1976) quotes from Patty Smith Hill's

papers as saying, "Don't put all your strength into fighting your opponents and ideas of the past. Put all your faith and effort into the present and future" (p. 306).

The author wishes to thank these organizations for their help in gathering facts and information for the presentation:

Archives of the Association for Childhood Education International, University of Maryland.

The Filson Historical Society, Louisville, KY

The author also wishes to thank Dorothy W. Hewes, professor emeritus, San Diego State University, for her support and editing of this manuscript.

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